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FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6391
INFO RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY 0066
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY 2253
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 1504
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 1330

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001193

SIPDIS

MOSCOW/USDA FOR KIM SVEC

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON AFRICAN SWINE FEVER OUTBREAK IN ARMENIA
(09/27/07)

REF: YEREVAN 1107 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) A Food and Agriculture Organization (UN/FAO) delegation dispatched to Armenia to assess the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in mid-September characterized the current situation as alarming. Concerned by the lack of bio-security measures to combat the outbreak, the delegation recommended the GOAM and international donors urgently commit to a series of short-term actions to prevent ASF's further spread. While international donors stand by to assist, the GOAM's only response so far has been to ask for contributions to the compensation fund for swine farmers proposed by the delegation. As of September 19, 2,800 swine had been reported slaughtered in the country, most in the north - an increase of 1,000 since early September. There has been a report of recurrence of ASF in a northern region where swine had been culled previously. End summary.

UN/FAO ALARMED BY LACK OF BIOSECURITY

2. (SBU) From September 11-19, a five-member UN/FAO delegation composed of experts from the FAO, the European Community and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) visited Armenia to assess the country's needs in combating the outbreak of ASF which appeared in early August in a northern region of the country. On September 19, the delegation debriefed the GOAM and international donors on the major findings of their visit. Representatives of the GOAM included Levon Rukhyan, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, and Grisha Baghyan, Head of the State Food Safety and Veterinary Inspectorate. International donors at the briefing included the United Nations, World Bank, European Community and the United States (which USDA represented).

3. (SBU) Calling attention to serious gaps in Armenian bio-security, the delegation characterized the situation as alarming, particularly the fact that the GOAM has no outbreak response system in place capable of dealing with threats such as ASF. The delegation was concerned by the limited human and financial resources deployed by the GOAM to address the outbreak, the lack of control mechanisms to confine its spread, the lack of effective active or passive surveillance systems to track ASF, the lack of coordination by GOAM entities that should be working together to combat the outbreak, and the lack of epidemiological data necessary to respond to a biological threat such as ASF.

14. (SBU) The delegation said the GOAM urgently needed to develop a phased six-month action plan, and asked donors to help put one in place. The first priority should be to obtain and use disinfectants/confinement materials, and ensure distribution of personal protective equipment (PPEs) in affected areas. They also suggested the emergency response management structure be redefined, made less hierarchical, and authority delegated to the lowest levels. UN/FAO commended the GOAM on its public awareness efforts, particularly its early acknowledgement of ASF and dissemination of information on television and in newspapers.

15. (SBU) Specific recommendations made to the GOAM and donor community by UN/FAO at the September 19 brief follow:

- Donor community and technical agencies should be invited to participate in the GOAM task force meetings to draft a 6-month action plan;
- UN/FAO is prepared to commit itself to an 18-month, \$450,000 Emergency Technical Cooperation Project;
- Donors should closely coordinate their responses to ASF with existing programs in the Animal Health Sector;
- A compensation fund to farmers and pig owners for culled pigs should be established;
- A socio-economic impact study should be conducted;
- As the Caucasus comprises one epidemiological risk zone, donors should take a regional approach to helping the GOAM respond to ASF;

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- An exchange program with donor countries should be put in place to address training needs and build up veterinary capacities;
- Donors should help to cover gaps of urgently needed equipment for disinfection and confinement.

GOAM RESPONDS DEFENSIVELY TO ASSESSMENT

16. (SBU) GOAM officials reacted defensively to the assessment, and took offense at the critique of GOAM surveillance systems, referring to the Mad Cow epidemic in Britain as proof that surveillance systems are not a cure-all. Also, early in their assessment, UN/FAO specialists reportedly encountered some difficulty accessing areas they requested to visit, and encountered difficulty obtaining some necessary information from the GOAM. Once raised, this problem was overcome fairly quickly. Lastly, the only recommendation to which the GOAM has so far responded positively is support for UN/FAO's call to establish a compensation fund for farmers affected by culling. It is hoped that the GOAM will officially request, in detail, input supply and technical assistance needs from the donor community soonest.

NUMBERS OF SLAUGHTERED SWINE ON RISE AS PORK PRICES DIP

17. (SBU) At the UN/FAO debriefing, GOAM officials reported that 2,800 swine had been slaughtered since the outbreak - up 1,000 since early September and all in the affected northern regions of Lori (1,750) and Tavush (1,050). While no new cases have been reported in Tavush, Lori has seen one new case of ASF in a previously unaffected village. A Lori agricultural official also reported that a second wave, or recurrence of ASF, appears to be underway in villages where swine had been previously culled. So far Lori has reported a total of 20 cases of ASF. No new cases of ASF have been reported in Yerevan, and UN/FAO specialists dispatched to a farm in nearby Artashat issued a preliminary assessment that treatable swine

fever, not ASF, was the likely culprit there.

18. (SBU) The public awareness campaign undertaken by the GOAM appears to have made inroads of sorts, with mission employees reporting a 20 percent dip in pork prices. There does not yet appear to be any consumer panic, though conflicting views by various experts on the airwaves could change that. On a September 25 TV program featuring a consumer rights and food safety roundtable with Armenian food safety officials, the Head of Armenia's National Association of Consumers challenged the widely-accepted scientific view by stating that there is no guarantee that ASF cannot be transmitted to humans.

Comment

19. (SBU) The UN/FAO assessment casts strong doubts on GOAM capacity and resolve to respond effectively to the ASF outbreak or other biological security threats. As new cases occur in the north, the interagency task force established to respond to ASF appears not to be functioning as it should. The mission and other donors are standing by to provide technical assistance and deliverable equipment once the GOAM responds to the UN/FAO recommendations. Whether the UN/FAO visit will provide a wake-up call to the GOAM, however, remains to be seen.

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